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STATE FOR PRM, IO

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TAGS: [IO](#) [IT](#) [PREF](#) [ITALIAN](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: UN COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES: ITALIAN CANDIDATE  
EMMA BONINO

Classified By: DCM Emil Skodon, 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) Italian Radical Party leader Emma Bonino came to Embassy Rome March 4 to meet NEA DAS Carpenter. Bonino's NGO "No Peace without Justice" is managing an aspect of the USG-GOI funded "Democracy Assistance Dialogue" under the G-8 Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

2. (C) After meeting Carpenter, Bonino stayed behind to discuss with DCM and POL MC her candidacy for UN High Commissioner for Refugees. According to Bonino, PM Berlusconi has formally given her name to UNSYG Annan as the Italian candidate. (Deputy FM called DCM later to confirm that his government fully supported Bonino and hoped the USG would). Bonino said that she is aware of three other candidates who have been nominated by their governments: Bernard Kouchner of France, Gareth Evans of Australia, and "the Swedish Under Secretary" (presumably she meant Hans Dahlgren). She expected other names to be put in before the March 9 deadline, and said that she had the impression Mark Malloch Brown would be the key decision maker for the UNSYG. During the conversation, she noted that she thought Canberra's nomination of Evans was pro forma and not very enthusiastic. Kouchner was a strong candidate, she said, but the French were already well represented in top UN positions and may not push strongly for him, since other Europeans may be reluctant to see another high-level French appointment. In answer to her question, we said that the USG did not have a favored candidate at this time, and that several of the names being discussed appeared, like Bonino, to have the required political standing and management skills.

3. (C) We asked Bonino to make her own case directly to us, particularly on the management side. She noted that her portfolio as EU Commissioner for Human Rights (1994-1999) included the responsibility to establish and manage the European Community Humanitarian Organization (ECHO) with a budget of over a billion euros. While humanitarian funding was as "bureaucratic as everything else in the EU", she said that she had made the EU's humanitarian initiatives speedier and more effective. She was particularly proud of how well the EU had responded to the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo in 1999. Since ECHO had been a major donor to UNCHR in this period, she was well aware of how it was funded and managed. She said that she understands well the political challenge of the job, and that while one should always try quiet diplomacy first, she would have no hesitation to publicly "name and shame" when necessary to get states to meet their obligations to refugees.

#### EMBASSY COMMENT

4. (C) Bonino is the most prominent member of the Italian Radical Party, which combines a strong social conscience with a firm defense of individual freedoms. In Italy, it is the party that everyone loves but nobody votes for, attracting only two percent of the national vote (and no Chamber seats) in the 2001 elections. The Radicals exert an influence on the public debate that far surpasses their number, and are actively courted by both the center-right and center-left coalition. In the 1994 elections, Bonino was elected to the Parliament as a Radical, but under the umbrella of Berlusconi's Forza Italia party, an arrangement she may repeat in next year's elections. (Her appointment to the European Commission was made during Berlusconi's short-lived 1994 government).

5. (C) Four core elements of the Radical platform stand in direct opposition to USG policy: opposition to the death penalty; decriminalization of drugs; abortion rights (Bonino was the driving figure in Italy's legalization of abortion in the 1970s); and support for the International Criminal Court. We don't see that these positions would cause us heartburn in the UNHCR position (as opposed to the Human Rights Commissioner, for which her name was floated, but not pushed, in 2003).

6. (C) Her party and personal philosophy have led her to be actively supportive of a number of other USG priorities. Bonino was an early supporter of the establishment of tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda. She has enthusiastically backed the Community of Democracies, and

Berlusconi appointed her to lead the Italian delegation to the 2002 conference in Seoul. She helped organize and lead campaigns for the inclusion of women in the new Afghanistan

government and (beginning in 1990) for the eradication of female genital mutilation. Shortly after 9/11, she moved to Cairo to study Arabic and immerse herself in a deeper understanding of the Arab world. (She remains a Visiting Professor at the American University of Cairo while shuttling to the European Parliament and her NGO activities.) She is an enthusiastic supporter of the reform goals of the G-8 Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

17. (C) We have the highest opinion of Bonino's intelligence, energy, integrity and principles, all valuable qualities for this position. She would be a charismatic leader of the organization. Her outspokenness could at times cause us problems. We are less well placed to judge directly her management skills. Perhaps USEU could identify which USG official worked most closely with ECHO from 1994 to 1999 to give a better assessment of that.

18. (U) For those interested, Embassy Rome can send a longer unclassified biography of Bonino. Please address your

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request to Mina Mariani, marianim@state.gov.

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